

Written Testimony of the Honorable Al Green
Hearing before the House Armed Services Committee

Wednesday May 8, 2013

Chairman McKeon, Ranking Member Adam Smith, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the priorities that should be considered in the FY 2014 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).

The Housing Assistance for Veterans Act of 2013 (HAVEN Act) aims to modify and rehabilitate the homes of low-income veterans and veterans with disabilities. The HAVEN Act was included in the FY 2013 Senate NDAA but was removed in conference. This initiative is important as the Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that there are 22.2 million veterans in our country. In addition, according to the 2010 American Community Survey, 4.3 million veteran homeowners have disabilities and 2.7 million of our veterans are elderly.

Finally, many of those veterans who have disabilities and disproportionate housing costs are either at risk of becoming homeless, or are already experiencing homelessness.

What the bill does:

This bill authorizes the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to establish a pilot program that provides grants to nonprofit organizations to rehabilitate and modify homes of disabled and low-income veterans. The bill has a strong outreach component since it is administered through HUD, and veterans service organizations that have experience working with veterans. This program is competitive and when applying, organizations will need to detail their plans for working with VA and veterans service organizations to identify veterans who can benefit from the program.

Examples of the work to be done:

Examples of work that can be done under this bill include: installation of wheelchair ramps, bathroom reconfiguration, or other modifications that the veteran requires as a result of their disability. Organizations will be required to provide matching funds of no less than 50 percent of the grant award; and the repairs or adaptations will be provided at either no cost or at very low cost to the veteran.

Authorization:

To carry out this Act, \$4,000,000 will be authorized for each of the fiscal years from 2013 through 2017.

How it complements existing programs:

The HAVEN Act complements other existing federal programs as it provides for veterans who are not eligible for existing VA programs and thus, have fallen through the cracks. Under the HAVEN Act, the definition of disability considers the physical and mental limitations that veterans may face, regardless of whether the limitations are connected to the veteran's service.

Goal of the Program:

The goal of the HAVEN Act is to provide sustainable housing modifications for veterans who currently do not qualify for existing VA programs and cannot receive assistance even if they have dedicated their lives in service of their country. The HAVEN Act brings awareness to the needs of veterans by allowing more organizations to become involved in the cause of housing for veterans.

Importance of the bill and steps taken in the last Congress:

This bill is supported by veterans organizations like Rebuilding Together and Vets First. This bill had bipartisan support in the 112th Congress, passed the House by a voice vote, and was added to the FY 2013 National Defense Authorization Act. However, it was taken out of the FY 2013 National Defense Authorization Act during the conference committee. Chairman McKeon, Ranking Member Smith, we can all agree that helping our veterans is the right thing to do. We know that

veterans do not always seek out help, even when they need it. Thus, helping these low-income and disabled veterans, by repairing their homes before they come too dilapidated, is smart policy that can help to keep veterans self-sufficient and independent.